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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT Thursday, August 1, 1940.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "Women Carpenters." Information from the Farm Security Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Today the Farm Security Administration is reporting some of the ways its low-income rural families are improving their homes. For example, a clever farm woman used a hammer, a saw, and a needle the other day to make herself a davenport - a sturdy, neat piece of furniture to add to the comfort and attractiveness of her modest home. She was the wife of an FSA client who, long ago, had discovered that "When you don't have the best, you must make the best of what you have."

So one day when she was rummaging through the attic, she found an old wooden bedstead covered with dust and cobwebs. You and I might have left it there, but not this woman. She saw possibilities in it and went right to work.

First she cut down the head of the bedstead to the right height. The piece that was cut off was used as a frame for the back. Then she cut down the foot and sawed the remaining piece in two, using each half as an arm. Next she padded the seat and back with worn-out quilts and cotton, and made three pillows for the seat. Last of all, she made a pretty covering of bright-colored cretonne which was inexpensive, would wear well, and could be laundered.

What this practical farm wife did, others in similar circumstances are doing all over the country. Farm women with little cash are realizing they need resourcefulness and ingenuity in their homes. They use simple methods that involve only a bit of extra labor and perhaps a few pennies cost.

Of course, "women carpenters" are not at all unusual among farm women, though of course they usually confine their activities to their own homes. They are just as much at ease with a hammer and nails as with a needle and thread. And wherever you look, their homes show the results of their handiwork.

Take the Mississippi farm wife who looks longingly at every discarded apple-crate she sees. Why? Because to her it's a potential end-table, magazine rack, what-not, door-stop, salt box, flour bin, or what-have-you. She not only makes such things for her own home but sells them and gives them away as gifts. Each article is so attractively designed and painted that it is decorative as well as useful.

Then there is an Oregon woman who takes unfinished lumber and makes rustic furniture. Right now her living room contains two rocking chairs and a settee made from rough boards. Their total cost was sixty cents; a dime for nails and half a dollar for varnish. What about the lumber? You're right - lumber costs money! That is, it usually does. But this woman's husband hauls logs from a little patch of woods on his farm, and gets the sawmill to do his sawing free in exchange for part of the lumber.

The same enterprising "carpenter" has made a kitchen cabinet at very small cost. She used cypress wood for the top and finished it with turpentine stain. Over this she spread two coats of boiled linseed oil and the lower part she enameled with light ivory enamel. Then she lined the flour bin with scrap metal.

Out in Missouri the busy mother of a large family makes rocking chairs from willow trees. She takes the narrow straight limbs which are still tough and green and bends them into shape. These she binds or nails together so they stay exactly in place. Her latest achievement is four porch rockers which are as comfortable as a hammock and twice as safe!

What is more, at Christmas time she arranged with Santa Claus to bring her little girls a set of doll furniture that was the envy of every child in the neighborhood. The pieces were made from the tinest branches of ash and willow, and were miniatures a collector would prize.

In Arkansas, a tenant farmer's wife has made her own refrigerator. She didn't exactly build it - she dug it. She took a spade and shovel and made a hole in the ground. It was about two by three feet and located under a big shade tree in her

yard. Then she covered it with a lid insulated with sawdust. Even in the hottest summer weather, she says milk stays sweet two days.

Speaking of yards, the Farm Security Administration reports another industrious woman gathered waste strips of wood from a nearby sawmill and made a nice little picket fence around her home. She pointed the narrow strips with a hatchet, and drove them into the ground after a rain had moistened the soil. Then she whitewashed the fence and now is planting flowers and transplanting shrubbery from the woods.

Then there's a rural housewife in Kansas who has found new uses for old wash tubs. She makes hotbeds for garden plants. The other day she set three old tubs in a row - one for tomatoes, one for cabbage, and one for egg-plants. Then she put about two inches of loose rock in the bottom to aid drainage. She filled each tub one-third full of stable manure and packed it down well. On top she put six or eight inches of rich soil. For the coverings she used old window sashes, though muslin would have done as well.

Now her hotbeds are not only providing her with her own family's garden plants but are giving her enough to sell to friends and neighbors.

These are just a few of the things clever farm women are doing reports the Farm Security Administration. Maybe some of the ways women have bettered their living conditions will suggest ideas to other farm women for home carpenter work.

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